



Ian Cook in the I Cook Foods commercial kitchen in Dandenong South. 202497

Picture: STEWART CHAMBERS

Slap for authorities

By Cam Lucadou-Wells

I Cook Foods director Ian Cook says the latest Parliamentary inquiry report into the Dandenong South commercial caterer's closure raises a lot of questions.

"There's not one thing in that report that's critical of us. It's critical of the City of Greater Dandenong, it's critical of the health department.

"It said that things were done wrong or things weren't investigated.

"But they don't find against (Chief Health Officer) Professor Sutton even if it's crystal clear that he misled them the first time."

Mr Cook has protested his company's in-

nocence since being closed by authorities in response to the death of a Knox Private Hospital patient Jean Painter with listeriosis in early 2019.

It has led to a Parliamentary inquiry and several police investigations.

The inquiry was recently reopened after evidence alleged that Mrs Painter didn't eat ICF products.

In June 2020, Professor Sutton "misled" the inquiry's first hearings with a claim that ICF was Knox Private Hospital's sole supplier.

It was one of four main reasons given by the CHO for closing the business, Mr Cook said.

After contradictory media reports, Prof Sutton admitted at the inquiry's second hearings

that ICF was one of several food suppliers at the hospital.

The report found along party lines, with Labor Government MPs "ignoring obvious crimes", he says. "If anyone wants to read the truth, read the dissenting report by the Liberal members."

The report acknowledged serious allegations, which needed to be investigated by bodies such as Victoria Police or IBAC, he said.

Greater Dandenong Council CEO John Bennie said council was extremely concerned about the detrimental impact the false claims continue to have on the health and wellbeing of staff and on the organisation's reputation.

"Council looks forward to Victoria Police addressing the allegations of corruption and criminality as part of their investigation – all of which are vehemently denied," Mr Bennie said.

ICF has launched a \$50 million Supreme Court lawsuit against the health department and Greater Dandenong for what it asserts was its wrongful shut down.

Mr Bennie said the council looked forward to further testing the claims further in the Supreme Court.

Among its findings, the Parliamentary inquiry found there was a lack of Health Department protocol over council environmental health officers wearing body cams during inspections and how the footage is retained.

"Council has already acted upon the recommendations made by the Parliamentary committee in its first report on this matter in relation to the approach of local councils to food safety regulations," Mr Bennie said.

"Greater Dandenong City Council has only ever acted in the best interests of public safety and wellbeing by enforcing the State Food Act and will continue to do so in future."